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ABSTRACT

Culture learning includes the study not only of the highest artistic expression of a people, but also of the everyday patterns of communication and behavior. Recent sociolinguistic studies take the view that social rules, rights, and duties are properties not of individuals but of interaction itself, and are constantly changing. This implies that social organization derives not from an idealized structure but from continually evolving everyday life. In order to communicate in a language, therefore, it is necessary to learn a community's rules for speaking along with the language's grammatical structure. Conversational analysis may eventually be used to solve problems of culture learning and cross-cultural interaction. (CK)

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UNDERSTANDING HUMAN INTERACTION: THE STUDY OF EVERYDAY LIFE AND ORDINARY TALK

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There is a legend in Estonia that the god of song Wannemunne once descended onto the Domberg, and there, in a sacred wood, played and sang music of divine beauty. All creatures were invited to listen, and they each learned some fragment of the celestial sound: the forest learned its rustling, the stream its roar; the wind caught and learned to re-echo the shrillest tones, and the birds the prelude of the song Man alone grasped it all, and therefore his song pierces into the depths of the heart, and mounts upward to the dwellings of the gods (Wheelwright 1968:3).

The words of the prophets are written on the subway walls and tenement halls (Paul Simon, from his song "The Sound of Silence" 1965).

Two views of language: The Estonian story of the origin of language stresses the beauty of form and transcendence in the most creative reaches of human expression, poetry and myth. The lyrics from a rock song present another view, stressing the same beauty and transcendence in ordinary language, graffiti, and the language of the street.

Of course they both relate to culture learning. For ideally, learning about another culture includes learning both the highest artistic and spiritual expressions of its people, and their everyday patterns of thinking and doing. Clearly, however, learning to live in another society as someone more than a total stranger requires that the ordinary and everyday be a part of what we might call one's cultural repertoire, or fund of knowledge and skills for living. In fact, one measure of whether a person has learned another culture is whether his/her behavior is accepted as correct and appropriate by members of that society (Goodenough 1957).

Because communication is at the heart of acquiring one's native culture, as well as learning someone else's culture, researchers concerned with problems of culture contact and cultural identity have for some time studied language processes to gain insights into other social processes. If we look at culture learning as essentially a matter of communication, then we can also see it as a special case of cross-cultural communication. Effort has been expended on improving communication across different cultures, but systematic study of the processes underlying both the failures and successes in communication has been somewhat rare.

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One of the insights of recent interdisciplinary work in anthropology and linguistics is that an understanding of the dynamics and difficulties in cross-cultural communication should be based initially on understanding the dynamics and processes of communication within local communities. It follows that if we are concerned with how people communicate with each other, we should begin by looking at interaction in everyday life.

This paper is an integrative and evaluative summary of some of the approaches and findings of interdisciplinary research into everyday life and ordinary talk. We begin with a discussion of the interactional approach to studying communication, socialization, and speech. Then we go on to the analysis of natural conversation to demonstrate the kinds of insights into social meaning which such analysis can provide.

Some Interactional Principles

Traditional sociology and social anthropology have regarded social structure as a system of rights and duties which are properties of individuals (actors) in particular ranks or statuses. An individual has been regarded as having a multiplicity of statuses and roles from which to select according to the situation he finds himself in at any given moment. Choices are structured by norms for behavior in the society, which specify what status and role are appropriate to which situation.

Yet this traditional view of status and role as properties of individuals is a static characterization of the social system, and when applied to ongoing interaction, fails to explain the uses which individuals can make of social encounters.

Ward Goodenough (1965) has suggested instead that rights and duties are properties of interaction rather than of individuals. He argues that an actor decides how he wishes to present himself--what identity he wishes to take--according to what he wants to accomplish in a given interaction. Goodenough has thus reversed the traditional view of status and role to argue that if settings and occasions affect the identity an actor will select, conversely, selecting a particular identity shapes the occasion itself. The point here is that social relationships and identities are not static properties of individuals, but emerge as part of an ongoing interaction, and are realized by the mutual flows and adaptations of the participants in the interaction. In this sense, status and role are negotiated rather than assumed (Cicourel 1972).

In contemporary sociology, the interactional analysis of social encounters has been developed insightfully, if not precisely, by Erving Goffman in a number of books and papers written in the past few years (e.g., 1959, 1961, 1963, 1967, 1969, 1971). Goffman has argued that in any interaction, each actor provides a field of action for the other actors, and the reciprocity thus established allows the participants to exercise their interpersonal skills in formulating the situation, presenting and enacting a self or identity, and using strategies to accomplish other interactional ends.

One significant result of the interactional perspective on social organization is that the focus comes to be on human action more than on human arrangement. This implies that the nature of social organization and social structure in any society is not best illuminated by studying idealized and traditional statements or "charters" for norms and relationships. Rather, the attention shifts to ordinary, everyday life, where status, role, and norm are continually worked and reworked, revised and created in ongoing interaction (Garfinkel and Sacks 1969). As expressed by Harold Garfinkel, "the moral order consists of the rule governed activities of everyday life" (1972:1). (See also Cicourel 1972:242-50; and Cicourel 1970).

A second implication has to do with what we mean by socialization, whether from the point of view of a child growing up in a society, the continued socialization of an adult member of the society, or an outsider attempting to learn to live in the society and adopt its culture. Traditionally, socialization was seen as a developmental process: the newly

born human being gradually learns, in a series of specifiable maturational stages, how to live in the social and natural environment which exists prior to his entrance, and continues after his exit. But taking an interactional approach alters the meaning of socialization. Now, socialization becomes "the acquisition of interactional competences," that is, a child becomes a social being by interacting with other social beings in everyday activities (Speier, 1970:189). For child socialization, it means that the child is not the vessel into which culture is poured, but actively creates a social being while affecting the external world, through interacting with other social beings. For the stranger acquiring another culture, it means that true culture learning is competence in everyday life.

When people experience what is called "culture shock" on going from one society to another, it is probably not the obvious differences which cause the greatest sense of personal disorganization. In other words, it is probably not the differences in physical landscape, climate, religion, dress or even food which brings about the strongest sense of confusion. More often, it is in the assumptions underlying everyday life, shared by members of a society by virtue of constant interaction from birth, assumptions which are so much a part of the culture that they are not even consciously held. For instance, one American reports an experience of his own, when working in London. He found that it is not unusual to be issued an invitation to "Come over at 8 p.m." But this invitation does not indicate whether or not dinner will be served. The underlying social assumption here is that the guest is of the same social class as the host, and that therefore it is impolite not to assume that the guest shares the same social habits and expectations as the host. Being both an outsider, and also aware that social customs are changing in London, the American was never sure whether dinner would be served or not. A friend advised him of a strategy for dealing with this situation: "We always have a sandwich before going out. If we are given dinner, we are not too full to eat it. If we are not given dinner, we will be able to get through the evening without starving."¹

Thus another implication of the interactional approach has to do with what the social scientist sets out to study if interested in how people formulate identity, how they relate to each other, and on what grounds they function in their everyday life. The research focus is on communication among participants in an interaction, that is, especially on talk and on body language (proxemics, kinesics, etc.). Elsewhere in this volume, Boucher addresses the question of how emotion or affect displays correspond to the immediate situation in social interaction, and their use as strategies to accompany language. Here we will concentrate on talk, and especially on the kind of talk which we call conversation.

Some Conversational Principles

- A. What time is it?
- B. Look, we're going to make it, so stop worrying.

What are people doing when they talk to each other? How does one person manage to get a meaning across to another person? And how does the listener go about figuring out what the speaker is trying to say?

Learning the structure of a language, and learning how to create well-formed phrases and sentences which violate no linguistic dicta, is not the same as learning to use that language in social interaction. In order to communicate effectively, to interpret intelligently, and to perceive the social processes underlying interaction, learning a language must include learning the rules for speaking in a given community. The rules for speaking I take to be the nexus between language learning and culture learning.

Rules for speaking are not linguistic rules, they are social rules. Yet social rules operate much like linguistic rules: "they determine the actor's choice among culturally available modes of action or strategies in accordance with the constraints provided by

communicative intent, setting, and identity relationships" (Gumperz 1972:16). That is, rules for speaking are guides for what strategies a given speaker may use in order to get across his meaning to the particular hearer he is talking to, within the context of where, when, and how the interaction is taking place.

For some time, folklorists, anthropologists, and linguists have studied rules for speaking in certain kinds of speech events, such as storytelling (folktale, myth), spoken ritual (prayer, incantation), riddling, chanting, joking, recitation, and oratory. These kinds of speech events resemble each other in that they tend to be clearly bounded (have formulas for beginning, middle, and end), and are traditional in form and/or content. Furthermore, in most cultures there are labels or names for these speech events.

More recently, in the sub-discipline (some have called it a social movement) of sociolinguistics, linguists, sociologists and anthropologists have come together to look at some less formalized kinds of speech events, and to study the social rules governing them. For most members of a society, highly formalized speech events are more rare occurrences than everyday, ordinary conversation. Yet we know very little about the assumptions behind what people say in conversations; how they manage to weave their utterances together into a coherent whole; how they know when, how much, and what to say, and how they know what not to say. The new focus of study, therefore, is on natural conversation, or spontaneous talk (see Soskin and John 1963).

In the example above, on the surface of it Speaker B's statement does not follow from the question of Speaker A. It is neither an answer to Speaker A's question, nor does it make any other reference to the form or content of A's utterance. Yet, a member of American culture would have little difficulty figuring out: 1) the meaning which Speaker B has attributed to Speaker A's question; 2) the intention of Speaker B's reply to Speaker A. If we were to write an interpretation of what is really going on in this interaction, it might look like this (alternative interpretations are possible, of course):

Text

A. What time is it?

B. Look, we're going to make it, so stop worrying.

Gloss

Speaker's intent: The sun has already set, it's getting dark, and we're supposed to be there at 7:30, but we have more than an hour's drive left. I'm afraid that we're going to be late. I'm really worried about it, but I know that my getting worried irritates you.

Interactional task: communication of concern, desire for reassurance, etc.

Speaker's intent: I'm aware of how late it is, but I can't do anything about it, and we'll probably get there on time, anyway. In any case, worrying does no good and only makes me irritable, as you know.

Interactional task: communication of irritation/reassurance, termination of topic, etc.

Notice that there is a distinction between the semantic meaning of the utterances, and the social meaning of the utterances. Thus, B's reply is based on the relationship which she has to A, and to the background of experiences and understandings which they share. The question form--which from a purely linguistic point of view is designed to elicit an answer appropriate to the topic of the question--is being used to make a statement about the immediate situation, the emotional condition of the speaker, and the relationship

between the speaker and the person to whom the question is addressed. The participants in this interaction are using speech to create and maintain a social situation.

An analysis of the kind offered here, of course, must begin within a much broader descriptive framework. The most comprehensive analytical scheme for analyzing speech has been offered by Dell Hymes, in a series of papers over several years. An anthropologist, Hymes argues that we should be able to write an ethnography of speaking or communication comparable to (i.e., as thoroughly descriptive as) the ethnography of a culture.

As the social unit of analysis, Hymes defines speech community as "a community sharing rules for the conduct and interpretation of speech, and rules for the interpretation of at least one linguistic variety" (Hymes 1972:54). Notice that a speech community must share rules for speaking, not only rules for grammar. Thus, although at one level we may say that Singaporeans and Californians are part of the same speech community in that they share a grammatical knowledge of English, at the social interactional level we must conclude that they are not part of the same speech community, since they do not share the same social rules for speaking. Similarly, anthropologists can be said to constitute a speech community of a sort, speaking anthropologese (whatever the natural language may be!), a speech variety with rules for usage which are not shared with non-anthropologists.

The activity unit in Hymes' analytical framework is the speech event, a series of speech acts set off in some way from other activities and other speech events. For example, a conversation at a party, the offering of a prayer, or a telephone call, would qualify as a speech event.

Each speech event can be broken down into components which provide for it a descriptive framework for discovering the important dimensions shaping the interaction. Hymes has conveniently assembled these components under labels which, taken together, spell out SPEAKING, a very handy mnemonic for remembering them. As set out by Hymes, they are:

- S -- setting and scene
- P -- participants
- E -- ends (goals)
- A -- act sequence (message form and content)
- K -- key (tone, manner, or spirit)
- I -- instrumentalities (forms of speech)
- N -- norms of interpretation
- G -- genres

For any conversational interaction, the analyst notes the characteristics defined by the framework, and then relates these to the interaction itself. The next step, therefore, is to consider the intent of the speakers, and the step-by-step manner in which they achieve communication.

The example of speech interchange analyzed above, using both a text or transcription of speech and a gloss of the intent of the speaker and interactional tasks being accomplished, has been developed by John Gumperz (see Gumperz and Herasimchuk 1973). Gumperz points out that in the analysis of face to face interaction, social categories and social roles can be treated as communicative symbols: "they are signalled in the act of speaking and have a function in the communication process which is akin to that of

syntax in the communication of referential meaning" (ibid: 99). Knowledge of the social values and relationships implied in the communication is necessary in order to understand the "situated meaning of a message, i.e., its interpretation in a particular context" (ibid; see also Gumperz 1970). Gumperz and his students thus seek to discover the verbal patterns in conversation which are used as signalling devices or communicative symbols, and also, the underlying social values and understandings which are associated with these symbols. Conversational analysis begins by breaking down a chunk of talk into episodes. Episodes are marked by such boundaries as a change in topic, a change in role of the participants, or some other shift or break in the interaction.

Because both talk and transcription are linear, communication lends itself to such sequential analysis. The pioneering study in conversational sequencing was carried out by Emanuel Schegloff on telephone conversations (1968; also reprinted in Gumperz and Hymes 1972). On the basis of the order in which utterances were made, and the functions which they served in easing communication, Schegloff was able to extract a number of social rules for telephone conversation; for example, the "distribution rule" (the answerer speaks first), and rules for taking turns (see also Sperier 1972 and Schegloff 1972). His illustrations of what happens when the conventions of telephone use are violated are compelling, pointing out both our dependence on such rules, and the structure which they introduce into social interaction. Sequencing, then, is one of the significant principles of any communication process, and sequential analysis can be applied to all forms of speech event, including punning (Sacks 1973), conversational asides (Jefferson 1972), therapy talk (Turner 1972), and storytelling (Watson 1972). (See also Sacks, in press).

Another principle of communication and conversation is that much speech interaction is routine. Or to put it another way, routines constitute a high percentage of the exchange in talking. By routine is meant a sequence of utterances or behaviors which is regular and procedural, and which communicates as much by its form as by its content (for a definition and discussion of linguistic routine, see Hymes 1971; and Watson, forthcoming). A routine exists when conventional or symbolic meanings have become attached to speech or behavior carried out in a particular sequence a particular style. Thus the identification of routines is a next step in conversational analysis. Examples of some familiar routines, with clear boundaries at beginning and end, are greetings, leave-takings, thanks, and apologies. But most routines are not identifiable by name.

When two participants in a speech event share the same routines, their cooperation in speaking and being understood is greatly facilitated.² A classic analysis of a conversational routine was made by Karl Reisman, on speech which he recorded in an Antiguan village (Reisman 1970). He found that speakers in a particular kind of conversation (called "making noise") interacted with each other in a way reminiscent of musical counterpoint, and referred to the form as contrapuntal conversation: "each voice has a 'tune' and maintains it; and . . . the voices often sing independently at the same time" (ibid: 2).

A similar contrapuntal and alternating structure is also the underlying design for cooperatively produced "talk story" and joking among Hawaiian children (Watson, forthcoming). When added to the already musical and rhythmic contours of Hawaiian English (a creole speech variety), the effect is to make cooperatively produced stories sound like responsive chanting. Even false starts--mistakes in speech--become an elaboration on the basic rhythm: proper rhythm is actually more important than proper content.

Routines, especially those which are contrapuntal or resemble the chant, raise questions about the relationship of routines to ritual, and how social rules for speaking apply to both. Routines seem related to ritual, in that they are formalized patterns of speech and behavior. However, routines are not sacred--they exist only as social habits, with no component of sanctity. Furthermore, ritual seems aimed at a different level of human reactivity from routine. A ritual "speaks" less to the mind than to the body; a ritual gets to the emotional and unconscious level as well as to the cognitive level. Routines, on the other hand, as we have seen, are aimed at expediting and easing the communication of intent, message, and/or social relationships, and so

function at a less fundamental level of human interaction than ritual. Yet many of the insights from interactional and conversational analysis may be usable in analyzing sequencing in ritual, and the communication of symbolic meaning. Certainly storytelling as a speech event as well as a myth-creating event, benefits greatly from a rhetorical approach in which rules of speaking play a primary role (see Abrahams 1968, and Watson 1973).

Summary

The interactional approaches to conversational analysis and speaking rules are relatively recent, and so far have been applied mostly to speakers of English, with some significant exceptions.³ But the use of these techniques and the insights they lend to human interaction, promise well for understanding communication within speech communities, and across speech communities. Hopefully, the findings of conversational analysis will be applicable to solving problems in culture learning and cross-cultural communication.

One area of conversational analysis as yet little developed is the study of conversational rhythm. British linguists in particular, have worked out systems and vocabularies for studying intonation, tempo, and other aspects of speech rhythm. But almost no work has been done so far on the social rules for conversational rhythm, the meanings attached to intonational contours in speech, or the symbolic association of rhythm and intonation contour to shared values. Certainly, anyone living in Hawaii and hearing Hawaiian English spoken everyday becomes aware that so much of the significant social and semantic meaning in an interaction is carried in the melodies, hesitations, and modulations of the voice. It seems very likely, in fact, that what we mean by achieving rapport, and by really communicating with another person, has to do with knowing and flowing with shared verbal and non-verbal routines, and with shared rhythms of speaking.

FOOTNOTES

¹Mark Lester, personal communication.

²One of the significant indications that a person has learned another language and culture is the ability to participate in the routines of humor--to joke, make puns, or use irony. Humor depends on a depth of knowledge of the rules for speaking and the cultural values of a community. An interesting illustration of how rules for speaking and cultural background underlie humor is found in Michael Forman's analysis of a Filipino radio station in Honolulu. Humor among the staff follows the patterns of bilingual Tagalog-English speakers in Manila, for whom language mixing rather than "pure Tagalog" or "pure English" is the natural speech for informal conversation. Such mixing is used very effectively to create bilingual puns. For example, playing on sound similarities between Tagalog and English, or on typical pronunciation mistakes of Filipino speakers in English, the following kinds of puns--not caught by a non-Tagalog English speaker--can be used to spice a conversation:

He's a bwisiting professor from California.
(bwisit--Tag.: nuisance + Eng.: visiting)

Nag-attend ako ng kainference.
"I attended a kainference."
(kain--Tag.: eat + Eng.: conference)

Nagbisita ng klase kahapon ang mga superbasura.
 "Yesterday the superbasuras visited classes."
 (basura--Tag.: garbage + Eng.: supervisor)

(Forman 1974:5)

³Some of these are: Albert 1972; Frake 1972; Roberts and Forman 1972; Dundes, Leach and Özkök 1972; Moerman 1972; and Reisman 1970.

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